

[Old Timers Dictionary]

1000 words

Marie Carter

Anthony,

New Mexico Dup

OLD TIMERS' DICTIONARY

In

DETAIL

In the early days of our community the old-timers found many difficulties to overcome. Unacustomed, to the easy-going life of their Mexican neighbors, they were not contented to farm a little, eat a frugal mean of frijoles, chili and tortillas, and finish with a cigarette. They craved more luxuries and more entertainment than this primitive little border town afforded. Hence, life in Anthony, soon became a lonely, monotonous grind. When I asked one old-timer what he thought when he first saw out town, his reply was slow, but to the point.

"Whew! I'd hate to tell you," he said.

"Why?"

"Because the only house that reminded me of home was a brand new frame. "And, lady," he drawled, "there wasn't another one like it in town."

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"Where was it located?"

"Right over there on the highway where the Mesilla Valley Electric building stands."

"Did you like the food the natives cooked?"

"Not at first," he said, with a twisted smile, "but it didn't take me long to learn, and in a short time I was takin' my frijoles, tortillas and chili straight."

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Frijoles are beans, but not white beans. The Mexicans buy the mottled pinto beans. Tortillas are the wafer-like corn cakes made from hand-ground corn flour. The Mexican housewife scorns the tortillas flour sold by grocers. When making chili, they use the large, dark red, chili pods. First they steam, or roast the pods, then peel them, and use the thick rich pulp to make chili sauce.

"Old Timer," I said. "You seem to know a great deal about this Great Southwest."

"A little," was the modest reply.

"In what year did you come to this town?"

"1884. I came over the Anthony Gap."

The Anthony Gap is east of Anthony, and cuts through the Franklin mountain range. St. Anthony's Peak, or Anthony's nose, is part of the Franklin range. It has the appearance of a man with a huge nose.

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The little town of Anthony, New Mexico, is located in the upper part of the Rio Grande Valley, twenty miles north of El Paso, Texas, and twenty-three miles south of Las Cruces (the crosses). The main street is on the Highway of America. That historical road traversed by the early Spanish Explorers, and to-day by thousands of motoring tourists.

Parallel with this famous highway is the Santa Fe Railroad. West of the railroad is the ever-changing Rio Grande, a river, that gave the old-timers considerable worry. For, prior to the building of the Elephant Butte Dam, they were at its mercy. Almost every spring, from 1884 to 1904, it would rise, overflow, and spoil their crops. One old-timer told me that he quit planting seed in the spring, and went to building dams to protect his ranch.

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"Yep, I war right here at th' time," chirped another old-timer, and ex-cowboy. "We sure did hep our neighbors in them days. We had a flood in 1883 that was purty bad, but in 1912 we com' purty nigh bein' swiped (swept) in t' a dryer world." The old cowpuncher paused to pick his teeth with the end of a match.

"Why the whole Rio Grande Valley must have been inundated," I said.

"Wall," he drawled. "I don't know th' meanin of thet word, mum, but we sartinly hed oceans of water. That war so darn much of et, that we hed t' use a skive (skiff) t' fotch (fetch) some of th' ranch folks t' town."

"Some day I want you to tell me about your cowpuncher days," I said.

"Wall," he drawled, blowing the match out of his mouth, and favoring me with a free shower, "of hits yarns ye want, ahm right thar. But ah don't tucker much t' stories, cas ah ain't got no book larnin! Ye seen mum, aha sorta innocent."

"Oh," I said, "Really?"

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"Yes, mum," is all he said.

Shortly after talking to the old cowpuncher I met Judge Thompson.

"Judge," I began. "I'm curious about that little Catholic church northeast of town. Was it the first one built in this community?"

"No, indeed," he answered. The first Catholic church was a very small chapel. It stood on the other side of the road. I should judge about a hundred feet northwest of the present church."

"Who built it?"

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"A Mexican woman," he said, "That is, she had it built. Her name was Sabina Lopez d Gil. You, see, she didn't like the irrigation system, so she erected a chapel in honor of San Jose in the belief that he would furnish her water. At that time the Three Saints irrigation ditch headed at Mesquite, 12 miles north of Anthony. From Anthony it continued its course south, behind the present Bennett Drug Store, southwest of the Santa Fe Tracks."

"What did they call the Broadway of America in the old days?" I asked.

"Camino Real. E.B. Scott of Anthony, ran a stage route, which began at El Paso del Norte, through El Paso Texas, up the Rio Grande Valley to Anthony, north to Las Cruces, and Dona Ane. A short distance from Dona Ana it left the valley, and continued east of the Rio Grande to San Marcial. North of Dona Ana, on the road to San Marcial, was the famous Jornada del Muerto, or the Journey of Death."

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"But why?" I inquired, "Didn't they follow the route up the valley from San Marcial through Rincon, Hatch, Berry, Arrey, Palomas, Hot Springs, and on up to the Elephant Butte Dam?"

"Because it was unsafe. They were afraid."

"Afraid? Afraid of what?"

"Apache Indians. Those blood-thirsty devils who concealed themselves behind the heavy timber, ambushed travellers and killed them for the sake of killing. So they established a road across the open country, or Jornada del Muerto."

Camino Real, means, The King's Highway. El Paso del Norte, means the North Pass, but it is now called, Juarez, Old Mexico. In the early days the present El Paso was called, "Franklin." The route traveled by the stage out through the Black Range and Caballo Range mountains, across 85 5 miles of waterless country. In the summer, Jornada del Muerto, is a hot-bed of unrelenting heat, and many a poor traveller has perished while trying to cross it. There was also another stage route called the "Butterfield Stage Route," which turned west then it reached Mesille, Park, twenty miles north of Anthony. Mesilla means "Seat."